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Letter dated 8 March 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit the attached press release entitled "Ethiopia has to redeploy fully from the temporary security zone", issued today, 8 March 2001, by the State of Eritrea Commission for Coordination with the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission regarding the controversy of the temporary security zone (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex issued as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Ahmed Tahir **Baduri**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 8 March 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Ethiopia has to redeploy fully from the temporary security zone

Eritrea and Ethiopia have accepted the boundaries of the temporary security zone (TSZ) as proposed by Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, on 30 January 2001.

On the basis of this agreement, a detailed timetable for the redeployment of Ethiopian troops (12-26 February) and the rearranging of Eritrean forces (17 February-3 March) was worked out at the meeting of the Military Coordination Commission in Nairobi on 6 February.

While these agreements were in the process of implementation and when Eritrea had already rearranged a bulk of its forces in all the three sectors, Ethiopia reneged on its commitments and put pressure on the UNMEE Force Commander to radically alter the southern boundary of the TSZ.

The new TSZ proposed by the Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) cuts deep (10 to 15 kilometres) into uncontested and sovereign Eritrean territories in the southern and eastern sectors. In the Senafe area, for instance, tens of villages would remain under Ethiopian military occupation, thus preventing the return of thousands of displaced citizens to their villages and homes. In the eastern sector, the new TSZ would create a fresh influx of displacement as Ethiopian troops cross the Ragalli river and move into the Bada area.

UNMEE has tried to explain this unwarranted complication claiming that it had communicated the Ethiopian reservations to the Eritrean Defence Minister during a "courtesy meeting". This account is not only at variance with the facts but is also untenable. The Defence Minister gave no indications that Eritrea would accept any alterations of the TSZ. To avoid any misunderstanding, Eritrea reaffirmed its position in a formal written letter to UNMEE. Indeed, it is patently clear that UNMEE cannot reopen, for consultation or renegotiations with senior army officials, an agreement proposed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and sealed at the highest levels of authority in both capitals.

Having apprised UNMEE of its position, Eritrea repeatedly requested UNMEE to stick to the original agreement and suspended the rearranging of its troops that it had begun in good faith to underscore the gravity of the matter.

It is appropriate to underline that Eritrea had reservations even on the first TSZ proposed by the Secretary-General since it left many uncontested areas under Ethiopian control. But, as stated in the letter of 2 February of President Isaias, "Eritrea pledged its acceptance of the proposal recognizing the need for moving forward expeditiously and placing its trust in the United Nations".

The decision by UNMEE to placate Ethiopia and alter the TSZ is thus unjustified.

Furthermore, UNMEE cannot assert that it has verified the redeployment of Ethiopian troops when the TSZ has become controversial due to a breach of the

agreement. Likewise, Eritrea cannot be accused of not "rearranging its forces on the deadline of 3 March", when UNMEE itself altered the TSZ on which this deadline was based. In this regard, article 12 of the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities is very clear, as it stipulates: "Eritrean forces shall remain at a distance of 25 kilometres from positions to which Ethiopian forces shall redeploy".

The unexpected issuance of the UNMEE statement yesterday is also baffling. In the first place, the precise location of the TSZ remains a subject of controversy and discussion. In the second place, UNMEE officials had privately admitted to the mistakes committed, leading Eritrea to believe that a remedy would be found soon. In this spirit, a three-day visit to the various sectors was arranged yesterday, with the foreknowledge and acquiescence of UNMEE officials, for the diplomatic community, UNMEE and members of the foreign and local press, with a view to physically inspecting the precise location and humanitarian implications of the second TSZ. The team departed for Bada this morning.

Under the circumstances, Eritrea calls on the United Nations and its partners in peace to rectify the unnecessary mistakes made and ensure that all the parties concerned honour the agreements that they have signed.